

Winter Fire by gin_and_chronic

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Summary:

One cold night, several months after the adult Losers kill Pennywise, Beverly meets a handsome, oddly familiar man in a London bar.

1. Chapter 1

London was cold this time of year. Bitterly cold. It had been a wildly successful evening for Beverly Marsh, but here in this swanky hotel bar, dressed only in a slinky emerald green evening gown in the middle of February, all she could think about was the cold.

“Double Auchentoshan, please. Neat.” she said, saddling up to the only open barstool along the lengthy marble countertop. Marble was a poor choice on a night like this, she mused, having put her elbows down onto the counter only to rip them away a second later. Cold. Everything was cold.

“Interesting choice.” said a voice to her left. It was low and smooth and sounded... mostly American. There was a hint of something vaguely European there, as well. Perhaps he was the American child of immigrants. Or perhaps an American who’d been living abroad for years.

She turned her head to look at the man from which it originated, an astonishingly handsome specimen, perhaps 10 years younger than Beverly, not that anyone in this bar would be able to tell. She’d aged incredibly well, and at 40 was still considered a stunning beauty even against the younger faces in the industry. And there certainly was no shortage of gorgeous young faces in the fashion industry.

Light brown hair fell in a graceful swoop across his pale forehead, seeming to point like an arrow toward a pair of large, piercing green eyes set above high, chiseled cheekbones. He smiled at her with soft, full lips. They seemed oddly familiar. Perhaps she’d seen him at another show. Everyone in the bar seemed to be an industry insider, from the looks of it.

She still hadn’t said anything, so he extended a large, graceful hand toward her. “The famous Beverly Marsh.” he said, taking her hand gently in his and placing a kiss upon the top. “It’s an honor. I’m a big fan.”

“Robert Gray.” he continued, releasing her hand to point at his own face. She still hadn’t said a single word, she realized, and quickly

mumbled out a “nice to meet you”.

Robert Gray. That name. It nagged at the back of Beverly’s mind. Putting the pieces together, she figured he must be in the fashion industry. His familiar looks, familiar name, and the fact that he recognized her pointed toward that fairly obvious conclusion. She remembered reading a piece about an up-and-coming young designer in the latest edition of *Vanity Fair*. Was his name Robert Gray? She couldn’t quite recall.

Looking more closely at him, she decided he was more likely a model. Though sitting, she estimated that he was at least 6’2”, maybe even closer to 6’4”. Thin and toned, with striking bone structure, dressed in an impeccably tailored couture suit. Saint Laurent, from the looks of it. Definitely a model.

“I’ve been keeping an eye on you for a long, long time, Ms. Marsh.” he told her with a coy smile that made a blush rise to her fair, freckled cheeks. She brought her glass to her lips in a futile attempt to hide it. “You’re a woman of many talents.”

“Well,” Beverly began, fully enjoying the attention this gorgeous man was doting upon her, “it’s been a long journey, but I’m proud of the work that I’ve done.”

He beamed at her with a mouth full of straight, white teeth. “Oh, you should be.”

His smile dropped, and he took another sip of his drink, looking straight ahead at a bowtied bartender scaling a rolling library ladder to obtain a bottle of rare scotch from the top shelf. “It can’t have been easy to build an empire after everything you’ve been through.”

Beverly blinked rapidly, feeling an odd rush of cold make its way through her body once again. She’d been feeling much warmer since settling into this crowded room and sipping her high-proof beverage, but her arms now sported a growing collection of goosebumps.

This man seemed to know something about her. True, her tumultuous love life wasn’t exactly a secret to the world at this point. Her divorce from Tom and subsequent whirlwind romance with famed architect

Ben Hanscom had been mainstays in tabloid magazines for the past year. If this Robert Gray character had been keeping tabs on her career, he'd undoubtedly seen the stories. Still, something about his words didn't sit quite right with her.

Her train of thought was interrupted when he turned to face her again. "I really enjoyed the show tonight," he told her with a warm smile. "Your Spring collection is one of the most beautiful I've ever seen."

"Thank you," she said emphatically, a wide smile gracing her beautiful features for the first time that evening. "That actually means a lot to me. Like you said, it hasn't been the easiest road."

Truth be told, she was a little insecure about her work this season. The recent breakup hadn't exactly left her feeling very inspired. She looked down at her now empty glass, setting it upon the marble countertop and swiveling her chair to face him, now fully committed to the conversation.

His head dipped down slightly, looking up at her through thick, dark lashes. A flirtatious smile played on his lips, as he continued his flattery, explaining that his favorite pieces were her evening gowns. This season, she'd ridden the wave of her wild emotions to create moody, dramatic pieces, and the gowns truly were the crowning glory of her collection.

A warm rush of pride filled her thinking of the stories that would be written about her designs over the next few weeks, and the endless calls her assistants would undoubtedly be receiving from celebrity stylists preparing their clients for Awards season red carpets. She felt powerful, sitting here with Robert Gray. Of its own accord, her manicured fingers came up to twirl around a lock of fiery red hair as she flashed him an inviting smile.

"The fabric you selected, in particular, is just incredible," he continued before pausing to take another sip of his drink.

"It's almost as if it..." he stopped for a moment, looking down at his glass as if trying to find the right word. The corner of the lip closest to Beverly quirked up decisively as he set the glass on the counter in

a slow, deliberate motion.

“Floats.” he said, turning to her with a piercing gaze.

For no longer than a half-second, the green gaze flashed a bright, glowing gold, as Beverly stumbled backward out of her barstool. The blood had drained from her face, leaving her already fair skin an unnaturally white color.

“You...” she whispered in an accusatory tone, feeling a wave of fear and nausea pass through her body.

He swirled his barstool around to face her. “Now, now. Don’t make a scene Ms. Marsh. Or is it Mrs. Hanscom now?” he said, eyes looking down to her left hand. Finding no ring, he met her eyes again with a smug smile. “No, I suppose it isn’t.”

“You’re dead. We killed you.” she hissed at him quietly, trying not to draw attention. A quick glance around the room told her that everyone else was too engrossed in their own conversations to notice, luckily.

He flashed her a wide, dashing grin that revealed a shallow dimple on his right cheek. She hated how beautiful it was. It only served to further infuriate her. “No one who dies in Derry ever really dies, Bev.” he reminded her.

Spinning back around, he patted the empty barstool beside him, still warm from where she sat just seconds ago. “Sit with me.” he told her, motioning for the bartender to refresh their glasses. “Drink.”

2. Chapter 2

Against her better judgment, Beverly did in fact sit down next to him again. She knew she shouldn't. She should run. She should run up to her room, pack up her bags, and get the hell out of London right then and there. She should run someplace he... IT... wouldn't find her, not that she knew of any such place.

But... she was curious. Angry, but curious. For some inexplicable reason, she wanted answers to the myriad of questions that had all popped into her head at once upon discovering the true identity of Robert Gray just seconds prior.

So with a furious glare and a stiff posture, she sat down on the barstool beside him, close enough to feel the heat radiating from his lithe body. Suppressing an urge to lean closer to steal some of it from him, she instead sat up even straighter, staring straight ahead at nothing in particular.

"I have a lot of questions," she began in a stony, monotonous tone, "but since I don't plan on sticking around longer than it takes me to down this scotch, I'll cut right to the important one. What the fuck do you want?"

He chuckled at that, turning his whole body to look at her. They must have been quite a sight, she thought to herself after venturing a brief glance over at him. His body language couldn't have been more different from hers. Where she sat as stiff as a board, with tense shoulders pulled up almost to her chin, he relaxed in his barstool with open, inviting arms, leisurely swirling his drink in its thick-walled tumbler. The ice hitting the sides of the glass made a sharp ringing sound that further angered Beverly.

"Oh, Bev..." he began, the last remnants of his laugh giving way to a more serious expression. "That's a complicated one. You should have picked a question with a simpler answer, such as 'how the fuck are you still alive?'. I'd have been able to tell you my answer to that one in the time it took you to finish your drink."

She turned her head to stare at him expectantly, not needing to

verbalize her demand for him to elaborate. He smiled again, more deviously this time, startling her into looking away. "I have no fucking idea, Bev. Sure feels good, though." he said, leaning forward and placing one hand on the back of her barstool, effectively caging her in.

Beverly's breathing quickened and a hot, angry tear escaped her eye to swiftly roll down her delicately freckled cheek. The hand on the back of her barstool reached up, and Robert Gray used his elegant thumb to gently wipe it away. Her freeze response kicked in, and all she could do was stare at his striking face as he caressed her cheek. Warm, she thought. His thumb was warm. His face was... warm. Not smug, not cold. Almost regretful. Almost sympathetic. Warm.

She unwittingly relaxed into his touch, eyes darting all over his face. The clown. He was the fucking clown, just without makeup. And without a giant head, of course. He was the fucking clown... how did she not see it before?! And furthermore, was she now going to have to come to terms with the fact that Pennywise the Clown was legitimately drop-dead gorgeous, no pun intended?!

The hand still on her cheek slowly moved up to tuck a lock of hair behind Beverly's ear, short fingernails grazing the skin of her temple on their journey. She smelled the cologne on his wrist. Spicy. Expensive... Warm.

The thumb that stroked her cheek just seconds ago trailed down to gently caress her earlobe. She let out a shuddering breath and her eyelids fluttered closed for a moment. Just a reflex, she told herself. Just a reflex.

He leaned closer, his hair tickling the side of her face as he brought his mouth to her ear to replace the hand. "Let's go somewhere more private." he whispered, lips grazing its shell.

Before her brain had a chance to step in with logic... to scream '*No! Fuck you! Never!*'... she swallowed hard and gave a small nod. In a swift motion, he was out of his stool. He grabbed his glass and downed its contents in one gulp before taking her by the hand and quickly leading her away from her mostly-full drink and toward the back of the hotel lobby.

They stepped into an empty elevator. The doors closed, and he inserted a sleek black card into the slot above the buttons, unlocking the ability to access the top floor. Spinning on his heel, he spotted her in the corner farthest from him, white knuckles clutching the handrail as she attempted to calm herself. Her breath was coming quickly now, causing her flushed chest to heave beneath her elegant silk gown.

Robert Gray growled at the sight - a low, unnatural, thoroughly inhuman sound that reminded her that "Robert Gray" was not a handsome, charming fashion industry insider. She'd just willingly entered an elevator alone with IT.

Her eyes widened in panic and a strong spike of fear assaulted Pennywise's senses as he stalked toward her slowly. She stood perfectly still, freeze response back in full force. Just as he was about to reach her, the elevator came to a stop at the eighth floor, still nineteen away from their destination. He quickly spun around to stand beside her, one ankle crossing over the other in a carefully crafted display of relaxed, confident body language.

The silver doors slid open to reveal a well-dressed older couple who smiled politely at the beautiful young couple already occupying the space. The young man beamed back at them, though all the redheaded woman could muster was a shaky nod of acknowledgement. Beverly was initially appreciative of the fact that they didn't try to strike up a conversation, instead settling on simply pressing the button for the floor they wished to visit - 22 - and turning around to face the doors.

Behind them, plastered against the back wall, Beverly had now begun to experience a change of heart, wondering whether she should alert them to her predicament. Her train of thought was immediately derailed by the back of a slender hand sliding up the curve of her hip, stroking her gently through the thin fabric of her dress.

Pennywise continued his soft, tentative motions for a few moments, giving Beverly ample opportunity to slide away or otherwise make it known that his touch was unwelcomed. When she gave no such sign, he twisted his arm around so that he could caress her hip and thigh with the palm of his hand and his fingertips, giving a light squeeze on

one pass that caused her to release a tiny whimper. It wasn't audible to the couple standing only a foot or so from them, but Pennywise definitely heard it. And he *definitely* smelled her growing arousal.

He silently moved his hand further toward her center, allowing the very tip of his pinky to squeeze her inner thigh. The elevator stopped and she suddenly became acutely aware of how weak her knees had become when its gentle lurch caused her to stumble a bit, leaning into the firm body next to hers for support. He wrapped an arm around her waist and tugged her up against him as the older couple departed, giving them a final wave with his free hand... a hand which remained in the air until the elevator doors closed, at which point it became swiftly buried in the hair at the nape of Beverly's neck as he turned his body toward her and tilted her head back to meet his eyes.

"What did you put in my drink?" she whispered, looking up at him from beneath lust-heavy lids.

Confusion briefly crossed his features. "Nothing." he said earnestly, punctuated by a small shake of the head.

The elevator doors opened on the 27th floor, and Pennywise gently pulled Beverly directly into the living room of his penthouse suite, their bodies never separating. Leaning down to place his mouth against her ear again, he whispered for her to make herself comfortable before swooping off toward the kitchen.

Alone again, Beverly clutched a shaking hand to her chest and attempted to calm herself. A large mirror on the wall caught her attention, and she took a moment to look herself over, silently lambasting herself for getting into this situation. Nevertheless, she took a moment to fluff her hair and run her fingertip underneath her lower lids, removing a smear of mascara - a casualty of her angry tears. Slowly, nervously, she stepped toward the kitchen.

3. Chapter 3

Rounding a corner, Beverly found herself standing in an enormous, modern kitchen. A large concrete-topped island stood in front of her. Beyond it, a wall of floor-to-ceiling windows that revealed a breathtaking view of the city. In the distance, the London Eye spun slowly, illuminated in a steady flow of multicolored LED, but Beverly could focus on only one thing - a shiny, modern, thoroughly unique architectural masterpiece in the foreground... Ben Hanscom's BBC building. She had to avert her eyes.

The sound of a martini shaker in the corner behind her caught her attention, and she turned to find Robert Gray pouring what appeared to be Manhattans into two glass tumblers.

"You're supposed to stir those." she told him quietly, her tone suggesting that she didn't really want to talk, but couldn't resist correcting him. At his look of confusion, she elaborated. "A Manhattan or Old Fashioned... or really any cocktail that consists of only liquor is supposed to be stirred, not shaken."

"... Oh." he said awkwardly, a slight blush rising to his pale cheeks. "Well, that's a good segue."

She rolled her eyes at his cryptic statement as he walked over to hand her the incorrectly mixed drink and clink his glass against hers. "To our reunion." he said with a smile she'd have described as shy if she didn't know better. But she did, and it felt like a slap in the face.

She placed her glass upon the island with such force that a bit of cloudy liquid splashed out onto the concrete countertop. Grabbing a napkin - it wasn't the island's fault she'd gotten herself into this position - she wiped it up before moving her hands to her hips in a display of annoyance.

"What do you want, *Pennywise*?!" she asked, having never received an answer to the question.

He stepped toward her, but the violent glare she sent his way stopped him in his tracks. If he wanted to get anything out of her, he realized

he was going to have to play nice. “Bev...” he began quietly, but was interrupted by a finger coming up to point at him, motioning up and down along his body.

“Take that ridiculous disguise off!” she spat. “I don’t want you trying to make me forget exactly who it is I’m talking to.”

He choked back an amused laugh. “You want me to change into the... less ridiculous outfit?” he asked with a smirk.

She gave no verbal response, but her stone-faced look of animosity told him that the answer was ‘yes’. He stepped forward again, invading her personal bubble. Tilting her head back to look at him, her eyes softened to a look of worry. Even in her four inch heels, he was still a head taller than her, and she knew that his height would only increase further if he were to shed the disguise.

Dipping his head down to bring his mouth to her ear for the third time that evening, he whispered “Close your eyes, Bev.”

Déjà vu shot through her body in a tingling rush, but she complied, afraid of what she might see if she didn’t. She could feel a strange sensation in the air around her, lasting only for a second or two. After a moment, a silk-gloved finger hooked underneath her chin. “Good girl.” he growled.

She opened her eyes hesitantly to find herself face-to-face and chest-to-stomach with the enormous clown that terrorized her for an entire summer as a child, and for another long, exhausting week only months ago. Its hot breath mixed with her own, and she both smelled and tasted whiskey, vermouth, and a hint of something sweeter. Salted caramel, perhaps.

Beverly silently cursed her knees for weakening as the clown moved his hand from beneath her chin to allow the back of the glove to lightly coast across the skin of her cheek before stepping back and away from her. She grasped the edge of the island for support as she attempted to calm herself once again. In the back of her mind, she noted that she wasn’t afraid of him... of IT... in this moment. She was simply... flustered.

She looked up at him, standing on the opposite side of the island. Fuck, he *was* handsome. She'd never noticed it before, and hated that she noticed it now. But it was true. He looked just like Robert Gray... if he were to apply clown makeup, gold contacts, prosthetic bunny teeth, and a fake bulbous head. She couldn't unsee it. The striking bone structure, full lips, and lithe body remained underneath the garish costume.

"What do you want?" she repeated again, softer and more timidly this time.

He took a sip of his cocktail and appeared to be deep in thought, attempting to come up with the correct wording. "I want your help." he began.

She barked out a bitter laugh. "And just *why* would I help *you*?!" she asked incredulously.

He looked affronted, standing up straighter and dropping his mouth open slightly in shock. "Well, you kind of owe me, don't you think?" he asked, tone rising to meet hers.

"I OWE YOU?!" she screeched, prompting Pennywise to lift his hands in a desperate shushing motion. He wasn't in the mood to get kicked out of this beautiful suite due to noise complaints tonight.

"Yeah, Bev. You owe me. You tried to kill me *how many times*?" he spat back at her.

"Not enough, apparently, since it seems not to have stuck." she hissed. "Want to go again?"

She rubbed her face with her hands, stepping away from the island to begin pacing wildly. "Might I remind you, *Pennywise*, that you also tried to kill me countless times. Unprovoked. I'll be extra generous and say we can just call it even. I don't owe you shit."

Pennywise simply stood there staring at her in complete silence for far too long for the awkwardness to not impact Beverly.

"So what is it you even want my help with? Not that I'm going to give it to you, but I am admittedly fascinated by the audacity of your

request.” she continued, voice still terse and bitter.

He placed his gloved hands palm-down on the countertop, hunching over slightly and taking a deep breath. “I want you to coach me.” he said. “Show me how to live like a human. I just... I just want a normal life.”

Beverly was flabbergasted. She wasn’t sure what she’d expected him to say, but it wasn’t that. Her mouth dropped open in shock and she remained perfectly still and silent, staring at him blankly as though her brain was a computer in the process of rebooting. He took this opportunity to elaborate further, stepping around the island to come over to her side, leaning back against the concrete and dipping his head down to look her in the eyes.

“The cocktail is a perfect example.” he said. “I need someone who will teach me that a Manhattan should be stirred, not shaken. I don’t know these things.”

Snapped out of her trance, Beverly began to pace around the space again. “Okay, so get a girlfriend, then! Excuse my language, but you’re hot as fuck in that Robert Gray getup.”

She paused to glare at his smug smile before continuing on. “Most women would happily overlook your... lack of skills. I am not most women. I know exactly who - exactly *what* - you are.”

“Why would I want to be coached by a sycophant who’s going to be overly nice to me just because I’m, as you so accurately put it, hot as fuck?” he asked with a genuine look of confusion. “I’m looking for a teacher, not a groveling pet.”

He had a point. If he was actually interested in living a convincingly human life, he needed a hard-ass to show him the ways of the world, not a suck-up. But that posed a different question altogether - *why* did he want to live like a human? Didn’t he hate them?

“Alright,” she said with a sigh, acquiescing to his rationale, “let’s back up, then. Why is this even something you want?”

“I...” he began, before pausing to consider whether this was a piece

of information with which he should trust her. Probably not, he decided, but for the sake of convincing her to help him he chose to take the risk. "I think I am one now... in a sense."

At her look of outrage and bewilderment, he expanded on this theory. "I mean, I don't know that I'm *human*, per se. But whatever you guys did to me... I'm not what I used to be anymore. 'Human' is the closest way I can think to describe it. Here, feel!" he said, taking her stiff hand in his and shifting the fabric of his collar away to place her fingers against his jugular. She felt warm skin and a familiar rush of blood.

Not pulling her hand back, Beverly stepped forward and pressed harder on the vein. "What would happen if I grabbed that paring knife you used for the orange peel and sliced this open right now?" she growled menacingly.

4. Chapter 4

Pennywise grinned wickedly down at her, and in an instant her wrist was in his hand, wrenched away from his throat and twisted behind her back. He spun both their bodies around and pressed her up against the island, the concrete countertop digging painfully into her lower back. Leering down at her, he bent her backward at an agonizing angle as he snarled down at her with a mouth now loaded with sharp fangs.

“I’d probably bleed out, Bev. But luckily for me, I’m larger, stronger, and faster than you.” he growled. “Smarter, too, I’d venture to say. Never tip your victim off to your plans.”

She expected him to release her after that statement, but he didn’t. He inspected her curiously for a moment, as though looking for some sign of her intentions. Or perhaps just enjoying the view.

The longer she stood there, pressed against the island by his warm body, staring up into his strangely handsome face, the more she felt herself becoming aroused. It infuriated her, but at the end of the day, she’d become quite accustomed to violent physical altercations leading to wild sexual experiences. That had been Tom’s modus operandi, after all. It was simply a reflex at this point, she assured herself.

He leaned down closer to her, and her eyes began to slip closed of their own accord. “Now...” he growled softly, “are you going to be a good girl if I let you go?”

Beverly’s eyes shot open again, narrowing angrily at his smug facial expression. “Answer me, *Bevvie*.” he demanded, punctuating his request with a painful twist of her wrist.

“Ow! Yes... yes, okay?!” she spat out.

Pennywise gave her one last calculating look before deciding she was telling the truth - at least for now - and releasing her, stepping back around the island to quickly grab the aforementioned paring knife and toss it into a sleek stainless steel dishwasher, away from easy

reach.

“Another drink?” he offered, voice a little colder than it had been a few minutes ago. “Stirred this time?”

“Just bring the bottle of whiskey.” she told him flatly, making her way back into the living room to plop her entire body down dramatically upon a large black leather sofa, legs outstretched along the length of its cushions. She hadn’t bothered to remove her shoes, and was well past the point of caring whether she caused damage to anything in Pennywise’s suite. He could apparently afford it... *somehow*.

He obliged, following her into the room with a large bottle of Pappy Van Winkle’s 23 Year Bourbon in hand. She perked up when she saw it, a look of pure shock on her features. “You put *that* in a mixed drink?!” she asked incredulously. “A mixed drink that you didn’t even make correctly?!”

He looked down at the bottle in his hand, then to her, then back at the bottle. For the life of him, he could not figure out what she was going on about. “Did you buy that bottle?” she asked him.

“It came with the room.” he replied. “Which probably means I’ll pay for it later, right?”

“That’s an incredibly rare, incredibly *expensive* bottle of whiskey, and it’s meant to be sipped straight. Not mixed.” she informed him, tone softening a bit when she realized just how clueless he was about all of this. Most humans probably were, for that matter. She’d been living the lifestyle of a rich and famous fashion designer for years, and he’d been living... in a sewer. She couldn’t necessarily blame him for not being familiar with ‘Ole Pappy’.

He blushed a bit, seemingly embarrassed by his faux pas. Setting the bottle on the coffee table in front of Beverly, he approached the far end of the sofa and took both her legs in his arm, lifting them up and sliding underneath them. Her mouth dropped open, appalled by the brazen move, but she didn’t rip her feet away, even when he gently removed her leather stilettos and placed them neatly on the floor beneath the table.

A gloved hand rested casually on her left ankle as she stared blankly ahead at the roaring gas fireplace across the room. "What happened?" she asked him, so quietly it was almost a whisper.

He turned his head to look at her profile, with its elegantly upturned nose and full, cushy lips set against the backdrop of glowing city lights. She had grown into a truly gorgeous woman, and since that fateful day a few months ago, he'd begun to notice these types of things more and more.

"I don't know," he answered honestly, and the slight crack in his voice caused her to turn her head to look at him. "I thought I died. I... I can't really explain it."

He paused for a while, his thumb mindlessly caressing the top of her foot. "By the time I awoke again, I think it had been maybe three or four days," he spoke at last. "You were all long gone by then. And so was I, I suppose. Or what used to be 'me'... what was 'me' for billions of years."

"What do you mean?" she asked, leaning closer to him. How exactly would one wake up a different being and still be aware of the being they once were? She couldn't quite wrap her head around it.

He sighed softly, leaning his head back to look up at the exposed metal beams on the ceiling. "I don't know, Bev. I really don't know how to explain it. But I woke up feeling... clean. Free. Not ruled by any of the forces and urges that ruled me for eons. No hunger."

He shifted his gaze to look at her out of the corner of his eye, face still pointed upward. "I mean, I was hungry, but I wasn't *hungry*," he explained. "Not how I used to be."

"Are you still...?" she began, trailing off. He didn't need to ask her what she meant.

"No. No. I'm not," he answered emphatically, bringing his head down to look her straight in the eyes. "I had a steak today. That's the closest thing, I guess."

Beverly let out a sigh of relief at this news, releasing tension from her

shoulders that she didn't even realize she'd been holding. Without even noticing until it was too late, she reached her left hand over to gently rest on top of his right, which had been strewn over the back of the sofa. His own left hand still drew lazy patterns along the delicate tendons of her foot.

His gold eyes darted to her manicured hand, blinking in shock before looking to her face with an unguarded and clearly appreciative expression. The look he gave her was enough of a reward to prevent her from wrenching her hand away and spoiling the moment. She still wanted her questions answered, after all.

"I couldn't ever leave Derry before," he continued, "so I didn't think to try for a while. I just hung around town for about two months, trying new foods and whatnot. But as I was sitting in this little diner, some college kids at the booth behind me started talking about going on a roadtrip, and it suddenly occurred to me that a whole planet existed outside of Derry, Maine. And maybe it was open to me now."

She perked up a bit at his story, removing her hand from his to bring it to her other hand in a T-shape, a time-out motion which he somehow understood. "How do you pay for your meals? How did you pay for this incredible hotel room?"

He beamed at her, then, and she found herself more accepting of her own reaction to it. "Watch this!" he said excitedly. Leaning forward, he grabbed a hotel notepad off the coffee table with both of his massive, gloved hands. He placed the pad between them in a prayer-like gesture, pulling his hands apart after a moment to reveal a large stack of cash where blank white paper existed only seconds ago.

"No fucking way!" she exclaimed, laughing giddily and sitting up straighter to reach over and run her fingertips along the bills. "How did you discover that?"

"Oh, I've always been able to do that." he told her with a gentle smile. "But it stuck around after I woke up, and I finally had things I wanted to spend human currency on."

His face turned serious as he slowly placed the stack of money on the coffee table. "Bev..." he began, propping his legs up onto the sofa

and turning his whole body to look at her. "If you help me, I can give you anything you want."

Beverly's face fell. The moment of fun and excitement was gone, replaced by this conversation she wasn't keen on revisiting. "I don't need money, Pennywise. I have plenty of it on my own." she told him quietly.

"It doesn't have to be money!" he told her in a rush. "I can... manipulate things. Make things work out in your favor. Protect you. Ensure your future happiness."

Turning her head away from him, Beverly looked out the window again, eyes drawn to the gleaming BBC building. After a moment of contemplative silence, she spoke. "Hand me that bottle of whiskey."

5. Chapter 5

The bottle made a hideous glugging sound as she gulped down its expensive contents, still staring at the building that had made Ben Hanscom a household name. After the events that had transpired the past Autumn in Derry, Beverly and Ben had entered into a whirlwind romance that had burned as fast and as hot as the flames he wrote about on a tattered postcard many years before. By the time February rolled around, those January embers were long gone, extinguished by the cold rains of reality.

The problem, Beverly figured, was that a young, chubby Ben Hanscom had long ago fallen in love with the idea of a kind, pretty little redheaded girl. But Beverly Rogan (name now legally changed back to Marsh, though that probably wasn't much better) wasn't an idea of a girl. She wasn't a girl at all anymore. She'd grown into a very real woman, with very real baggage and very real flaws that made her destined to quickly plummet from the pedestal a certain architect had painstakingly built for her and then proceeded to place her high upon.

They had little in common aside from shared trauma, and everything Beverly did - every little mistake she made, every little word she uttered in a harsher tone than he'd have preferred - seemed to stab a hole right into the fabric of his entire existence. She was not the girl he fell in love with. She never really had been, and she certainly never would be going forward. They parted ways after four months, promising to keep in touch. They hadn't so far, though only a few weeks had gone by.

Turning away from the building and back toward the clown with whom she'd established some sort of strange kinship over the past hour or so, she extended the bottle. He gingerly brought it to his lips, taking a much smaller sip than she had. The delicacy with which he savored this rare liquor she'd taught him about made a small, wistful smile erupt on her lips. Perhaps he... IT... wouldn't be such a bad student, she thought.

"What are you expecting?" she said. The way she worded the question, as though she had already agreed to help him out, gave him

hope. He smiled warmly at her, placing the bottle back into her hands.

“Honestly?” he began, “I didn’t really think we’d get this far. I haven’t really thought about specifics. Maybe we can figure them out together, since I don’t know what I don’t know. As someone who is presumably human, you might have a better idea of how long it might take me to learn the ropes.”

Beverly took a smaller sip of the whiskey as her brows furrowed in thought. “You seem to be doing fairly well already. You’ve already flown to another continent, booked a penthouse suite, and seduced a wealthy woman at a hotel bar.” she said, smiling coyly and setting the bottle down on the coffee table. “Maybe a month of tutelage? We can always shorten it if we don’t need that much time.”

Or lengthen it, he thought to himself, but he refrained from voicing that idea. “You have to live here with me.” he said instead, and quickly came to the realization that this was a bad move.

“What?!! *That* is where I draw the line, Pennywise!” she shrieked, and he came to the conclusion that she must have thought he meant something... more intimate. She adjusted her body in preparation to stand up and remove herself from the sofa, and possibly his life, when his hand caught her gently by the forearm.

“Get your mind out of the gutter, Marsh.” he told her in a tone that was an odd mix of condescension and attempted consolation. “Think about it; I need someone who will be there to answer any questions I might have, or show me anything I might need to be shown. It would be far simpler for both of us to be in close proximity. Plus, this room is pretty amazing and you’d be staying here all-expenses-paid.”

Relaxing back into the sofa again, Beverly took a steadying breath. She had to admit that his logic checked out. A month of living in the same enormous penthouse as him probably wouldn’t be that bad. The place had to be at least 2000 square feet. There was probably even a second bedroom. If not, the bedroom was definitely hers, and he could sleep right here on the sofa.

“I have a show next weekend in Paris. And another in Milan in three

weeks.” she told him. “I can’t miss things like that.”

“I’ll come with you.” he offered, perking up at the idea. “It’ll be a good learning experience.”

Beverly leaned forward and placed her elbows on her knees, bringing her head down to rub at her eyes with the palms of her hands. “What else?” she asked with a sigh of resignation.

He smiled at her, leaning back and crossing his arms over his pom-pom clad chest. “I’m a simple man. You can’t try to kill me. Ever. And you can’t tell your friends from Derry about me, because then they’ll come and try to kill me. That’s pretty much it.”

“Don’t try to kill me and I won’t try to kill you.” Beverly spat, leaning forward to poke his muscular chest with her index finger. “No trying to kill me, and no trying to harm me in any way. Physically or emotionally.”

Suddenly, another thought occurred to her. “What will you do if I say no?”

“Nothing.” he told her with a tone of finality. “You’re free to walk out of here tonight, or any point over the next month. You’ll never see me again, if you so choose. I won’t come after you or anyone else. But you’d be losing your chance to capitalize on my talents. Anything you want, Bev. I can give you *anything*. ”

Beverly wasn’t actually sure what she wanted just yet, but sitting here tonight, she knew she didn’t want to give up on the opportunity to take advantage of what seemed like a pretty good deal for her. All she would have to do is sacrifice a month of her life in return for anything she could possibly desire. It was a pretty sweet trade.

“I’ll have to get back to you on what I want,” she told him, receiving an understanding nod in return, “but I’ll accept your deal under a few conditions. In addition to the ‘do no harm’ thing, I want you to swear to me that you’ll never harm an innocent again, and I want your assurance that you’ll be kind, respectful, and honest over the next month.”

“That’s it?” he asked, surprised by the simple nature of her requests.

“That’s it.” she confirmed. “And, of course, whatever I decide I want after we part ways.”

Pennywise held a massive hand out for her to shake, effectively sealing the deal. “Pleasure doing business with you, Beverly Marsh”, he said with a smile Beverly could only describe as charming.

Standing up and walking over to the room phone, situated on an elegant wood desk against a window overlooking the river, Beverly called the front desk to cancel her room reservation. “Come help me get my stuff.” she told Pennywise, spinning back around to face him. “That’s your first lesson in being a human man. You’ll get far in life by helping people - especially women - move.”

He held up a finger as if to say ‘just a moment’, before heading off toward the bedroom. When he returned, he did so as Robert Gray. Holding a hand up to fan herself dramatically, Beverly muttered an “Oof!” before blushing heavily under the realization that she’d consumed enough whiskey to completely remove her filter.

“Forgot how gorgeous you are.” she mumbled, bringing a bright, beaming smile to his beautiful mouth.

“You’re one to talk.” he said quietly, looking her dead in the eye and making her blush deepen further. He bowed down in a comedic display of gentlemanly behavior and motioned toward the elevator. “Shall we?”

6. Chapter 6

Between the two of them, quick work was made of packing up Beverly's belongings. She left him to do the actual moving of her heavy suitcases, of course. When he brought them out of the elevator and into the living room of the penthouse, he made a beeline for the bedroom, where he proceeded to place them at the foot of the bed and gather his own belongings in his arms, moving them into a smaller room across the hall. Beverly was impressed, not having even had to ask. All things considered, they were off to a pretty decent start, if you weren't counting the paring knife incident.

He left her on her own to unpack her belongings while he settled into what she had mentally begun referring to as "the guest room". After a few minutes, she heard his door open and quiet footsteps leave that section of the suite, presumably headed toward the kitchen. Sick of wearing her uncomfortable evening gown and heels, Beverly pulled a long-sleeved pajama set made of expensive, cream-colored silk out of her suitcase. She quickly wiped away her makeup, removed her gown and all its accessories, and tossed on her nightclothes before heading back out into the common area.

Exiting the hallway into the kitchen, Beverly's jaw dropped open in surprise at the sight before her. Pennywise had transformed back into the clown, but gone was his over-the-top costume. Instead, he wore a form-fitting black v-neck tee and a pair of unacceptably attractive light grey sweatpants. Manners be damned, she stood for a moment simply analyzing his body.

She had never seen any part of the clown uncovered, save for his face and a small sliver of his throat, which she promptly threatened to cut open. She noticed that the paper-white skin of his face, which must not have been paint but simply the skin that this form came with, extended down as far as she could see on his chest.

His upper arms were also bright white, though the skin gradually darkened to a deep purple tone (aubergine, the designer in her noted) as they approached his hands. While his elbows remained mostly white, by the time her eyes reached his fingertips, she noticed that the skin was almost black. Glancing down at his feet, she found that

they were the same deep, dark purple tone as his hands, and assumed that his legs must look much like his arms -- white thighs which gradually darkened closer to the ground.

Beverly wasn't sure how long she stood there gawking at him, but by the time she brought her eyes to his face again, she found that he thankfully wasn't paying attention. He was instead occupying himself with trying to figure out how to remove the corkscrew from an unopened bottle of wine. The whiskey bottle had been more straightforward. She chuckled a bit at the way his face screwed up in frustration, staring at the bottle as though it might simply crack open under the pressure of his gaze. Maybe it would, she thought. She wasn't quite sure the extent of his powers, but she grabbed it out of his hands before she had a chance to find out.

"Let me show you." she said gently, already taking her teacher role rather seriously. Grabbing a corkscrew off the bar where he'd incorrectly mixed their cocktails, she flipped it open and set the bottle on the island's concrete countertop. He hunched down, bringing himself to eye-level with the neck of the bottle, and she chuckled softly again. With Pennywise watching intently, she twisted the corkscrew into the cork at about half the speed she normally would before placing the small metal hook on the glass neck and prying upward. The cork popped out with a pleasing sound that caused Pennywise to smile widely. Beverly was somewhat grumpy to discover that she found it impossibly cute.

Pennywise grabbed two wine glasses from the bar, and she proceeded to pour them each a hefty glass. The red liquid looked a lot like blood, he mused, watching it cascade out of the bottle. His life had certainly changed a lot in a small amount of time. His thoughts were interrupted by Beverly's delicate hand holding his glass out to him.

Reaching out to grab it from her, he overshot his landing a bit, causing his bare hand to slide over her fingers in the process. In an instant, both parties felt an electrifying rush move through their bodies. Their eyes shot to each other's faces and locked there for a moment before Beverly cleared her throat awkwardly and spun on her heel, grabbing her glass and the remainder of the bottle and making her way to the sofa.

“So...” she began, sitting down cross-legged on the leather cushion, “what questions do you have?”

“Ah!” he exclaimed, hopping up and quickly darting back to his room. When he returned, he did so with a spiral-bound notebook. Pages upon pages of notes had been scribbled with whatever writing utensil happened to be in his vicinity whenever the thought popped into his mind. Beverly couldn’t contain a hearty bout of laughter at this, but finally settled herself down so that they could jump right in together.

The randomness of his questions was nothing short of fascinating to Beverly. Interspersed with questions as simple to answer as “how much water should I drink?” and “what does ‘homosexual’ mean?” were questions like “how does the internet work?” and “how do you drive a car?”

Beverly did her best to answer the questions she could, and Pennywise made little notes in his notebook where he’d need to do a bit more research on his own to find the answers he needed. She pulled out her phone and showed him how to access Google, to make things easier. However, he’d need to either acquire a phone or a laptop the next day. Simple enough, since he could simply create cash out of whatever unwanted object happened to be sitting around.

Similarly, Pennywise put a little star beside topics that Beverly couldn’t really explain - she’d just have to show him. Things like driving and cooking. Eventually, she thought, he would end up asking her to show him how to kiss... or worse. That was going to make for an awkward conversation. She shook her head as though trying to physically force the thought from her mind, thankful that he happened to be looking down at his notes in that moment.

Glancing at her phone screen, she noticed that it was already 11:47, and this simple realization brought out a massive yawn. He looked up quickly, uncertain of what was happening. Noticing his look of confusion, she explained that she was tired.

“Do you sleep like a normal person now?” she asked.

"I don't know... how do normal people sleep?" he replied, brows furrowed.

Beverly explained the gist of it - every night for several hours, instead of for 27 straight years after a year or more of being awake. He smiled, and confirmed that he'd been sleeping nightly since reawakening, seemingly comforted by the fact that this was normal.

"Sometimes, though..." he began, a worried look covering his features. "Sometimes I get tired in the middle of the day. Often after eating. Is that bad?"

She assured him it was normal, and mentally cursed herself for continuing to find these statements endearing. Things like this should push her away, she thought. They should remind her that he's not really a person. But fuck, she found him cute in his moments of confusion and worry.

Downing the rest of the wine in her glass and popping a stopper into the neck of the bottle to preserve what remained, she got up and began to make her way toward the bedroom with Pennywise at her heel. Stopping when she reached the door, directly across from his, she turned toward him and placed a hand on his bare bicep.

"Good first day, kiddo." she joked. He didn't smile, though. He instead silently turned his entire head to look down at the hand upon his skin. She felt the muscle twitch beneath her and felt the mood suddenly shift.

He slowly lifted his gold eyes to look at her with an unguarded expression that made her heart beat so fast and so hard she could hear it inside her head. Her hand remained frozen on his warm arm, even as that arm began to move forward, Pennywise's hand reaching out to slide along the cool, smooth fabric at Beverly's waist.

She gasped sharply, and the trance was instantly broken. He stepped backward, pulling his hand back as though it had been burned. Her own hand hung awkwardly in the air for a moment before she quickly ripped it away and directed it safely behind her back, reaching for her doorknob.

“Goodnight.” he mumbled in a barely audible tone.

“Goodnight.” she whispered back, quickly darting into her room and closing the door behind her, leaning against it and taking deep, calming breaths.

Pennywise stood staring at her closed door for a moment before slowly turning and entering the guest room, feeling more confused than he thought he ever had before.

7. Chapter 7

When her alarm clock sounded the next morning, Beverly woke up nothing short of disoriented. Where the fuck was she? This wasn't her hotel room. In rapid motion, the memories of all that transpired last night came back to her. *Fuck.*

She had, in a somewhat literal sense as far as she could tell, made a deal with the devil. Not only that, there was an undeniable heat between them, in spite of... or, as Beverly's mind piped up, perhaps *because of* their history. The thought inspired in her such an intense feeling of shame and self-loathing that she briefly feared she might vomit all over her... his... ITS sheets.

Bolting out of bed, Beverly rushed into the bathroom attached to her room, hunching down over the toilet. She waited for a minute or so, but nothing came up. Shakily returning to a standing position, she looked at herself in the mirror, bringing her index fingers up to poke at the outer corners of her tired eyes, at her growing collection of crow's feet which seemed particularly prominent in the harsh vanity lighting.

It had been almost 28 years since she met the *thing* she had now committed to living with for the next month, and she wondered if she'd actually done any growing up in that amount of time. Her body was looking and feeling older, certainly. But she was still making the same stupid mistakes she'd have expected from her teen self. Worse ones, actually. She wondered whether she'd have fucked IT last night, if IT hadn't pulled back. Burying her head in her hands, she silently indulged in another brief period of self-beratement before standing up straight, shaking it off, and getting ready for the day... and month... ahead.

Beverly could hear the clown out there in the kitchen, and she smelled the distinct aroma of freshly-brewed coffee. Her mouth began to water at the scent, but she remained in her room until she heard him return to his own. She opened the door and made her way into the kitchen in an impressively stealthy manner, even opening and closing the refrigerator with such caution that it barely made a sound. As she began to quietly pour herself a mug of coffee, however,

a voice piped up right behind her.

“Morning!” Pennywise said cheerfully, standing less than a foot away clutching a steaming mug that looked comically small in his massive, dark hands. As quietly as she’d been able to move, she might as well have been dressed in a gown of cowbells compared to him.

She shrieked in surprise, dropping her mug. It fell to the ground with a loud crash, breaking into many small shards and covering her bare feet in scalding liquid.

“Fuck! Fuck, I’m sorry!” Pennywise exclaimed, throwing himself on the floor to wipe her feet with a dish-towel before picking up the ceramic chunks.

“You need to announce your presence *before* you’re right behind someone.” Beverly growled, face still screwed up in pain and annoyance. “How’s that for a lesson in humanity?”

He froze, looking up at her with wide-eyed, innocent worry. “Please don’t consider that a violation of your conditions.” he implored. “I really didn’t mean to cause you harm. I swear.”

She sighed, dropping to her knees to help him pick up the remaining mug pieces. “It’s okay. I’m fine.” she told him. “Just... try not to startle me. Especially first thing in the morning.”

Their eyes met and Beverly quickly came to the realization that their faces were far too close for comfort. Before her body could betray her and ignite that familiar spark again, she stood up quickly, walking over to grab a fresh mug from the cabinet over the dishwasher.

Making a conscious effort to put physical distance between them without coming off as hostile, she made her way over to a chair by the fireplace - a piece that would only fit one body, unlike the sofa. She curled up with a thick blanket and began to read through her emails on her phone. Pennywise sat down on the sofa and sipped his coffee while intently observing her from across the room, a behavior Beverly noticed with vague annoyance, but didn’t care to correct right now. Less communication was preferable at this point.

One email in particular caught her eye as she skimmed through the 50-some-odd unread messages she'd received since last checking her inbox. The subject line read 'Dinner in London tonight?'. Eyes darting over to review the sender's email address, she smiled and rolled her eyes affectionately at the screen. The email had come from RT.trashmouth@gmail.com

Beverly and Richie had become quite close over the past several months - far closer than she'd become with any of the other remaining Losers... well, except for Ben, but clearly that wasn't the case anymore. Richie Tozier and Beverly Marsh talked on the phone about once a week these days, texting and emailing each other a little more frequently - mostly whenever he saw something he thought she'd find amusing. Though their adult friendship was still fairly young, she was beginning to think of Richie as her best friend.

Opening the email, she discovered that he had altered a flight plan to give him a longer layover in London specifically with the hopes of catching dinner with her while she was still in town. Very sweet of him, she thought with a wistful smile. He'd only have about 4 hours of free-time before he needed to head back at the airport, but that was plenty of time to grab a bite and catch up. And, as luck would have it, the restaurant that had become Beverly's favorite was less than a block from the hotel in which she currently sat. She quickly shot off a reply before visiting the restaurant's website to reserve a table for two.

In the time she spent making these plans, she had pretty much forgotten about Pennywise, still sitting on the sofa across the room, watching her amused facial expressions with intense curiosity.

"Can we go get me a phone today?" he asked her hopefully. She jumped a bit at his voice, and he gave her another apologetic look. "You look like you're having fun with yours."

"Oh, umm... sure." she told him, not keen on explaining that it was her best friend inspiring happiness in her, not the phone itself. "Meet back out here in an hour?"

He nodded gleefully, and the pair proceeded to go about their separate morning routines. They showered, brushed their teeth, and

got dressed for the day. Beverly applied a small amount of makeup, but resisted the urge to get dolled up. She didn't want to give him the wrong idea. After a bit of deliberation, she selected a modest, casual outfit consisting of jeans, sneakers, and a slouchy, olive green turtleneck sweater. Nothing flashy. Definitely nothing sexy.

She couldn't say the same for his outfit. He exited his room and entered the living room as Robert Gray. The legs that carried him toward her were clad in an impeccably well-fitted pair of dark-wash jeans cuffed over brown leather Chelsea boots. The navy blue sweater he wore on top hugged his toned figure all too well. While there was nothing particularly flashy about the outfit, it was most certainly a sexy look.

Sober enough to bite back her reaction this time, she stood up and gestured toward the elevator. The pair boarded the machine and embarked upon their Sunday adventure. On their way out of the hotel, Beverly swung a sharp right, walking around the corner and into a little bakery that Pennywise had not previously noticed. The owner seemed to know her, Pennywise realized, which means she must have come in here before.

"The usual, Ms. Marsh?" asked the kind older lady, wiping flour from her hands onto a grey apron.

"Yes, and whatever this one wants." Beverly replied, using her thumb to point at the handsome young man beside her.

He had no idea what he wanted, having never eaten these types of pastries before. The closest thing, he supposed, were funnel cakes from the circus. He told the proprietor that he'd just like to order exactly what Beverly did. The owner seemed to find this amusing, for some reason.

"Do you have work today?" Pennywise asked Beverly, walking back out onto the street with croissants in hand.

She explained to him that it was Sunday, and that a lot of people weren't expected to work on Saturdays and Sundays. She happened to be one of them. Tomorrow she would need to attend to some things, but she mostly worked from home and therefore wouldn't

need to leave the penthouse very often. This delighted Pennywise, who believed that meant he had her all to himself.

The day progressed smoothly, and Beverly was thankful for the fact that, out here in public, the sexual tension was almost completely eliminated. They established a cordial, professional rhythm as they acquired him a phone - a pay-as-you-go phone, since he didn't know whether he'd stay in the UK past this next month, and since he had no information with which a telecom company could run a background check to approve him for a plan. She also suggested they purchase him a laptop, just for the sake of being thorough and giving him plenty of options for learning about and beginning to integrate into human society.

With their shopping completed, the pair grabbed lunch at a small bistro on the river. Beverly found herself greatly enjoying the opportunity to teach Pennywise all about the menu offerings. As she came to learn, his diet so far had been extremely simple - foods he was already used to seeing others eat, like steaks, hamburgers, and pizza. In the back of her mind, she noted that he had copied her breakfast order, realizing that he probably did that everytime he went to a food establishment. He most likely just looked at someone else's plate and told the waiter "I'll have that".

She tasked him with ordering something new, and he did - a Niçoise salad. Not the most adventurous choice, but completely foreign to him. While the texture was strange to him at first, he found that he greatly enjoyed the flavors, and he happily scarfed it down.

Lunch ended, and Beverly racked her mind for things they could do - things that would be educational for him and wouldn't tire her out too much, since she was having dinner with Richie tonight. She settled on bringing him to a museum she'd been wanting to visit for a while, killing two birds with one stone. Not only could he learn a bit about human society from the exhibits themselves, it was also a prime people-watching destination. Beverly was delighted to find that her idea was actually perfect - it truly was a brilliant experience. He had no shortage of questions, and she felt like the few hours they spent there likely doubled his knowledge of how the human world worked.

At a little after 5pm, they returned to the penthouse. Beverly headed straight for her room to begin preparing for her dinner. When she came out 45 minutes later, she did so looking like a movie star. A black cocktail dress hugged her figure beneath a tan wool dress-coat. The same black leather pumps that adorned her feet the night before made a loud tapping noise on the kitchen tiles. Her lips were painted as red as Pennywise's, and her shiny ginger hair was freshly curled. Most of all, though, Pennywise noticed her scent. She had applied a small spritz of an intoxicating perfume with a flowery, yet spicy aroma.

Beverly realized Pennywise, who had since changed back into the clown and into his sweatpants, had been staring at her slack-jawed for quite a while. In the back of her mind, she realized she'd been caught doing the same to him on multiple occasions, so it would be hypocritical to snap at him. She did, however, look up at him questioningly.

"What's going on?" he asked as soon as she established eye contact.

"I'm going out." she stated simply, walking toward the elevator.

In an instant, he was there blocking her access, his arms spread wide across the metal doors. A look of outrage covered his starkly-painted features. He snarled down at her.

"You're not going anywhere." he growled.

8. Chapter 8

Beverly's face screwed up with such fury that Pennywise was momentarily terrified of her.

"Yes, I most certainly am." she growled lowly. "Get out of my way."

He held his ground. "Where the fuck are you even going dressed up like that?" he snarled, baring his sharp teeth while looking her up and down.

The way he posed the question instantly brought to mind memories of Tom Rogan. A jolt of fear shot through her, and the scent didn't go unnoticed by the clown. That familiar aroma that he used to love so dearly now felt like a punch in the gut. He softened instantly.

"Will you just tell me where you're going? And when you'll be home?" he said quietly, pausing at the facial expression that his use of the word 'home' inspired - a strange combination of surprise, disgust, and amusement. "Will you please just talk to me, Bev?" he continued.

He looked so lost in this moment, and she came to the realization that he must be acting this way out of worry and fear, not having yet developed a level of maturity that would allow him to handle his emotions like an adult human. She too softened, sighing heavily and relaxing her posture.

"I'm going out to dinner with Richie. He's in town for a few hours." she told him, voice still carrying a slightly rough edge. At his look of surprise and confusion, she expanded. "We've become quite close over the past few months. I'm just going to dinner for a couple hours with my best friend. I'll probably be back around 8:30 or 9."

"Oh." he said, looking at his feet. He felt a bit guilty now. "Can I come?"

She barked out a loud, bitter laugh that brought an embarrassed blush to his paper-white cheeks. "Are you fucking kidding me?!" she nearly shrieked.

"I'll wear the disguise!" he replied, voice rising to a nearly frantic plea.

"Oh, okay!" she said snarkily. "You'll wear the disguise. The disguise that looks exactly like a bare-faced Pennywise the Dancing Clown! Great idea!"

She pushed him out of the way to hit the button that would summon the elevator. "You're the worst thing that ever happened to Richie." she growled up at him. The elevator doors opened, and she stepped inside, hitting the lobby button.

"Stay the fuck away from my friends." she ordered. The doors closed.

Pennywise couldn't believe what had just happened. He stood staring blankly ahead at the closed elevator doors for a long moment, mouth open in shock and outrage. How *dare* she speak to him like that?! He stormed off to his room, slamming the door behind him despite being alone in the penthouse.

Meanwhile, Beverly arrived at the restaurant in under 5 minutes flat, since it was only steps from the hotel. Walking in, she saw that Richie had already arrived. He was seated at a candlelit table near the window, adorned with a rose in a small, pretty bud vase. She quickly came to the realization that the manager must have thought that their reservation for two was intended as a romantic date, and smiled wanly at the irony. She couldn't avoid thinking of Eddie, seeing Richie sitting all alone at the lovely table.

He looked up and noticed her, instantly bounding up to run over to her and embrace her in a suffocating bear-hug, which she gladly returned. The pair sat down and jumped right into a conversation as if they had only seen one another the night before, though it had actually been well over two months since they were in the same room. She was in the middle of briefing him on how her recent show had gone, when she suddenly felt movement at her back.

"Beverly! What a pleasant surprise finding you here!" a familiar voice exclaimed happily. She froze, then slowly turned her head to look up at Robert Gray.

Silently seething up at him, her eyes grew impossibly wide as they took in his outfit. Beneath his black wool dress-coat, he was dressed in a silver suit with a white shirt and a silk tie the same distinct orange-red as the pom-poms on his clown suit. *The audacity of this fucking clown.* Her eyes shot up to meet his again, and he momentarily feared that they might actually pop out of her head. He could smell the intense anger rolling off of her.

“Aren’t you going to introduce us?” he asked with a smug smile, never breaking eye contact.

“Richie,” she began, not yet turning around - she wasn’t done glaring, “this is Robert, my... apprentice.”

“Yeah, Beverly’s doing a great job of showing me the ropes!” Robert replied with a smile, gaze shifting to Richie.

Richie stood up and, with a polite smile, reached across the table to shake Robert’s hand. “Nice to meet you, man. I’m Richie Tozier.”

She hoped Robert would excuse himself at this point, despite knowing he probably wouldn’t. Indeed he did not. He grabbed an empty chair from an adjacent table and dragged it over, scraping it obnoxiously on the floor.

“Richie Tozier the comic?!” he exclaimed, plopping down at the table. Richie nodded. “Wow, what an honor! I’m a big fan!”

Beverly shot up rapidly, grabbing Robert by the upper arm. “Come on, Robert; let’s go check your coat!” she said in a falsely cheery voice.

She pulled him roughly toward the coat check at the front of the restaurant, out of Richie’s view. Shoving him into a corner, away from watchful eyes, she jabbed a fingernail sharply under his chin.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?!” she hissed, baring her teeth as though she might bite him. He smirked at exactly how non-threatening she was to someone like him.

“I’m hungry.” he said smugly. “Thought I’d grab a bite to eat. Heard this place was good.”

“Leave.” she snarled. “Leave right now or the deal is off. I’m not fucking around, Pennywise.”

With a loud huff, he acquiesced, storming out of the restaurant and back toward the hotel. As much as he didn’t like that she had snubbed him tonight, he wasn’t willing to let go of their deal. He still needed her, and she knew it.

Beverly calmed herself for a moment before walking back over to the table. At Richie’s look of confusion, she put on a fake smile and explained that Robert got called away while they were checking his coat. But that he said to tell Richie it was an honor to meet him.

“Bummer.” Richie said, looking out the window in hopes of catching a parting glance. “He’s cute. Is he single?”

Rubbing her temples to try to stave off the impending headache, she sighed and said “He’s not gay.”

“Really?” Richie asked. “A guy that well-groomed, working in the fashion industry? Are you sure?”

“I’m sure.” she said curtly.

“Ahh... so you guys...?” Richie paused to make a sexual gesture with his hands, thoroughly enjoying the look of outrage it brought to Beverly’s face.

“No! GOD, NO!” she exclaimed fervently. “I just happen to know he’s not gay.”

He gave her a knowing smirk, and the two continued their dinner in peace, sharing funny stories and more alcoholic drinks than Beverly probably would have consumed if ‘Robert Gray’ hadn’t walked in the door that evening.

Parting ways begrudgingly at the end of the dinner, Richie rushed off to catch his flight while Beverly stormed to the hotel elevator, mentally rehearsing exactly what she would say when the doors opened and she stepped back into the penthouse.

9. Chapter 9

The elevator doors opened, revealing an obviously intoxicated Pennywise on the sofa, donning his clown look once again, but still dressed in the silver suit from the restaurant. The jacket had been removed and haphazardly strewn over the coffee table. He had unfastened the top button of his shirt and loosened the tie, and his sleeves were bunched up to the elbow, revealing his dark, toned forearms. He looked incredibly sexy, and that fact only served to further enrage Beverly, who came storming out of the elevator with an audible growl.

She opened her mouth to yell at him, but before she got the chance to lay into him, Pennywise managed to get out the first words. With a self-satisfied grin, he looked up from his place on the sofa and said “Hey, Bev! How was dinner?”

This was too much for her. With a loud shriek, she ripped off her heels and threw them, one after the other, right at his head. His reflexes were fast, barely dulled at all by his inebriation, arms shooting up to block the blow. He jolted up off the sofa, appalled at her behavior. She wasn’t even close to done.

Storming over to the bar, she grabbed an empty tumbler he’d been using to finish off a large bottle of scotch that hadn’t even been open when she left that evening - Jesus Christ, that amount of alcohol would have *killed* a human, she noted in the back of her mind.

He swerved his head, narrowly missing the flying glass, and it crashed against the tile fireplace surround, shattering into hundreds of shiny little shards. Beverly looked around for the next thing to throw, but found the penthouse to be frustratingly tidy. In her drunken fury, she settled on simply launching her own body at him, fists flying wildly.

Pennywise wasn’t keen on hurting Beverly, but he also wasn’t going to let her hurt him. With catlike reflexes, he caught both of her arms mid-swing, twirled her around, and backed her up to the nearest wall. Cushioning the back of her head with one hand, he pinned her roughly to the wall, both her wrists held high above her head in the

other. The hand that had prevented what surely would have been a well-earned concussion came forward to wrap firmly around her throat.

He snarled down at her with razor-sharp fangs, and in the dim light of the fireplace she realized that his irises were gold no longer. A bright crimson red had taken them over. In an instant, the strong, bitter scent of fear overwhelmed Pennywise's senses.

He pressed her harder into the wall, wanting to capitalize on this opportunity to make his dominance clear. Looking down into her wide eyes, the corner of his upper lip lifted into a sneer.

"I'm not so sure I need you anymore, Bev." he snarled. "I can just Google everything, right? What do you think?"

It was an empty threat, but she didn't know that. Her eyes widened and began to fill with frightened tears. "Penn... please." she whispered pleadingly.

In that moment, hearing her shorten his name for the first time, his anger began to shift into something else. Still leering down at her, he began to notice how wild and disheveled her red curls had become in the course of their altercation. How flushed her face was. The beautiful way her eyeliner had become smudged beneath her eyes. The heaving of her chest. She was the most incredible thing he'd ever seen.

He'd imagined her begging him for mercy many times, but in these fantasies it always ended with him laughing gleefully as he ripped her body apart. That was definitely not what he wanted to do to her body now. He tried and failed to prevent a growl from escaping his throat. Beverly recognized the growl for what it was as soon as it hit her ears. Not the growl of a monster, but the growl of a man who was intensely, irreversibly aroused.

With great satisfaction, Pennywise smelled Beverly's scent changing, and felt her arch her body ever so slightly into his own. Releasing her throat, he swiftly scooped her up by the back of a thigh and hoisted her body high on the wall, until her legs came up to wrap around his waist.

Her skirt riding up in the process, she gasped when she felt his hot, impossibly hard cock through the two thin layers of fabric that separated them. Her lacy black panties became instantly soaked, and she noted in the back of her mind that there would likely be a visible wet spot on his thin silver slacks.

Pennywise rolled his hips to grind against her roughly, moaning lowly at the realization that the minimal cloth between their bodies allowed the head of his cock to push between her lips ever-so-slightly. She too realized this, and their eyes locked in a moment of understanding and deep, intense pleasure. He was penetrating her only the tiniest amount - a fraction of an inch - but Beverly was certain that it was the most erotic thing she'd ever experienced. She threw her head back in rapture at another roll of his hips, releasing a loud moan into the air above her.

Leaning forward, Pennywise dragged his open mouth across the pale skin of her throat, tongue darting out to taste her in the process. Past the point of playing coy, Beverly's mouth released a chorus of gasps, moans, and inarticulate panting sounds.

Finally, the sound Pennywise had been waiting for came. "Please, Penn." she repeated in a breathy, desperate tone, begging for something entirely different now.

Making his way up to her face, he moved his open mouth over hers, too quickly to be considered a kiss. Moving down to her jawline, his tongue continued its exploration until he had reached her ear.

"I love hearing you beg for my cock, Bev." he growled in a low, demonic register, teeth grazing her earlobe and drawing another uncontrollable moan from her mouth. "But there are apparently some lessons I need to teach *you*."

He dropped her suddenly, stepping back and leaving her in a desperate puddle on the living room floor. Calmly walking into his room, he shut the door behind him as Beverly watched in open-mouthed shock.

She sat frozen for a few minutes, half expecting him to return and pick up where they left off. He did not. Eventually accepting this, she

shakily rose to her feet and made her way back to her own room. Stripping herself of her black cocktail dress and soaked underwear, she tossed on a nightgown and hopped into bed. She wasn't sure if she'd have the energy to remove her makeup or brush her teeth before falling asleep, but she had more pressing matters to attend to in that moment.

Unbeknownst to Beverly, Pennywise had already beat her to it, immediately shedding himself of his clothing once the bedroom door had closed, collapsing onto the bed and imagining that Beverly was right there with him. This became even easier when his superhuman hearing picked up on the fact that she was across the hall pleasuring herself, too. Unable to keep an arrogant smile from his face, he pumped himself vigorously, listening to her failed attempt at staying quiet.

Take her, a voice in the back of his head cried. She's over there touching herself, thinking about you. Take her!

Pennywise snarled to himself, tamping the thought down. Not only was she drunk and angry - not exactly how he wanted their first experience to go - he also needed to maintain the power in order to get what he wanted out of her. He needed to play hard to get.

Beverly was aware of the fact that what she was doing - masturbating to a man... no, a creature... that had terrorized and tried to murder her and her friends, and that she honestly believed would kill her for a moment tonight - was wrong. But as she rubbed her swollen bud, she found herself approaching orgasm faster than ever before. She bit hard into a pillow beside her face to keep from screaming out his name upon completion, a fact that still didn't go unnoticed by the *thing* across the hall, thrown over the edge himself by her muffled cry.

The final ripples of her orgasm gone, Beverly looked up to the ceiling. "Fuck." she whispered, feeling a wave of dread wash over her.

10. Chapter 10

When Pennywise awoke the next morning, face down in a puddle of drool on his pillow, it was with a splitting headache the likes of which he'd never before felt. Turning over onto his back and promptly bringing the wet pillow over to sling across his head, thus blocking out the offensive morning light, the memories of the previous evening came flooding back to him. He groaned into the fluffy object, feeling a sense of dread. And poorly timed arousal.

What was it that humans always said extinguished arousal? A hot shower? No... a *cold* shower. That was it. Dragging himself out of bed and into the bathroom, he turned the shower level to the coldest setting and stepped in. YEP! That did the trick, alright. He yelped quietly at the sensation, noting that he couldn't possibly become aroused in this glass torture chamber. It would be physically impossible.

Once he felt he'd gotten his body's physical desires well under control, he turned up the water temperature and made quick work of removing the stench of alcohol, dried saliva, and sweat from his body. While scrubbing himself down, he came to the uncomfortable realization that he may have jeopardized their deal last night. Did he physically harm her? No. Not really. He was pretty gentle and restrained, all things considered. Did he *emotionally* harm her? Very possibly.

He needed to apologize, he realized, in order to have any hope of retaining their arrangement. He didn't think he actually was sorry, but he knew humans liked hearing those words. It was worth a try, at the very least.

Hopping out of the shower and into a clean pair of jeans and a loosely fitted hoodie, he exited his room, pausing for a moment in the hallway. Bev was probably still asleep, he thought, beginning to walk toward the kitchen. The sound of a crinkling plastic water bottle from her room stopped him in his tracks, however, and he walked over to her door, quietly giving it a knock.

"Who is it?" Beverly said in a groggy voice, rubbing her fingers along

her temples in an attempt to assuage her terrible headache. She heard a light chuckle from hallway.

Blushing when she realized her mistake, she cleared her throat and said "I mean, what do you want?"

"Can I come in?" he asked softly.

She paused for a long moment, contemplating whether she should allow it. Finally, Pennywise heard a heavy sigh and an annoyed voice - "Yeah, sure. Whatever."

He entered to the sight of her sitting up in bed, clad in a black satin nightgown and clutching a nearly empty bottle of water. Her red hair was sticking up at wild angles much like his own, and her makeup was smeared. She looked beautiful.

He paused for a moment, simply taking in the view, before approaching the foot of the bed, where he sat down and placed a hand atop her blanket-covered ankle. At her questioning, irritated stare, he began.

"This conversation is especially difficult with you sitting there looking like that." he joked with a gesture up and down her body. Her mouth dropped open in outrage, believing that he was insulting her appearance. *How dare he?! Who was he to talk, sitting there in full clown makeup?!* She opened her mouth to provide a cutting retort when she noticed the look on his face. It was tender and reverent, and she realized that he wasn't insulting her at all. He thought she looked *good*. She snapped her mouth shut, attempting to ignore the flutter in her chest, and silently implored him to continue.

"I'm sorry." he said somberly, proud of his impressive display of fake sincerity. Although... a little voice in the back of his head did question how fake it actually was.

"For?" she asked, curious to hear his thoughts.

"For everything." he elaborated. "For interrupting your dinner, for antagonizing you, for... for using what's between us against you."

She looked away in embarrassment. A voice in the back of her head

told her to deny it - to tell him that there's nothing between them. But she knew that it would be the most blatant, most obvious, most laughable lie she ever told. So she stayed silent.

Beverly felt tears welling up in her eyes, and she looked back up at him, lower lip quivering slightly. Pennywise felt a terrible tightness in his chest, desiring nothing more than to crawl over and hold her. To rock her gently. To never let her go. But he settled for giving her ankle a comforting squeeze and looking away sadly.

"I know this can't happen," he said, voice shaking slightly. "I know it would never work, and that we're going to go our separate ways after all this is over, and probably never see each other again."

Her heart panged painfully and a tear finally fell from her eye. Why, she wondered angrily? Why was she fucking *crying*? Wasn't that what she wanted? To never see this monster again?

"Bev..." he continued, and her eyes shot to his. "I'm obviously hopelessly drawn to you like a moth to a flame. I always have been, and I think you know that."

He paused for a moment, wondering why he felt compelled to go into this level of detail, but shrugged it off. He'd already gotten this far, so may as well lay it all out. "Granted," he continued, "I haven't always been drawn to you in... this particular way. But clearly I am now, and I'm going to try to keep it tamped down. I promise."

She opened her mouth to say something, but nothing came out. She just stared at him with wide, wet blue eyes. After a moment, he gave her leg an awkward parting pat, standing up and beginning to step toward the door. He paused for a moment, not turning around to face her. Her chest tightened in anticipation of what he might say.

"How do you get rid of the headache?" he grumbled. She smiled widely with amusement. Apparently the insane amount of alcohol he'd consumed the night before didn't leave him completely unaffected.

She swung her legs out from under the blankets to place them on the floor, beginning to move toward the bathroom. "Let's go get

breakfast.” she said. “Just let me shower.”

She passed him on her way, and the air shifted around them, wafting his delicious, freshly-showered scent toward her nose. She had to hand it to him - the man... *thing*... had good taste in fragrances. Her knees weakened and she walked more quickly, shutting the door behind her and bringing her fingers to her temples once again.

Over the course of the next several days, Beverly was impressed to find that they had established a pretty decent rhythm, all things considered. She still gawked at him when he wasn't looking, and she was more than sure that he did the same to her, but that was innocent enough. Nothing wrong with admiring something beautiful... right?

Most shocking to her, however, was exactly how safe and comfortable she felt in his presence. Curled up beside him on the sofa one night, mindlessly watching some random sitcom re-run, she reflected on the fact that if you had told her a week prior that she'd be living in the same penthouse as Pennywise the Clown... the same penthouse as *IT*... she'd have firstly told you that this would be impossible, as *IT* was dead. But, moreover, once she was forced to accept the predicament, she'd have told you she'd be looking over her shoulder at every moment, constantly on edge. She'd lock herself away safely in her room and avoid him at all costs.

That just wasn't the case, though. Not once had she bothered to lock her door. Typically, she didn't even hang out in her bedroom during the day. A normal day for the two of them looked much as it did for any roommates. Yes, that was it... *roommates*. They certainly weren't acting like a couple or anything.

It was perfectly normal for roommates to cuddle up on the same sofa to watch a movie at night. It was perfectly normal for a roommate to carry his fellow roommate to her bed when she'd fallen asleep on said sofa, tucking her neatly in and leaving her with a fresh glass of water to drink when she awoke. It was perfectly normal for a roommate to masturbate to thoughts of being pinned to the wall by her fellow roommate... almost every single night... *right*?

In her heart, she knew that none of this was normal. That she

shouldn't feel this comfortable with this monster. That she shouldn't feel this drawn to him, this connected to him, this attracted to him... *IT*. Not him. *IT*.

A full week had gone by since their fateful meeting in the hotel bar, and she already couldn't remember what life had felt like before Pennywise. This version of Pennywise, at least. Unfortunately, she quite vividly remembered the previous iteration. But the past several months, between his supposed death and their reunion, seemed like a blur. All that existed was this moment. The here and now.

Her thoughts were interrupted when he turned his head to look down at her, beaming. He'd seen something amusing on the TV, and in a very human moment, looked to his fellow TV watcher to gauge her reaction. She hadn't been paying attention, but smiled up at him anyway. She couldn't not smile when he did. A perfectly normal thing for roommates, she thought, as he wrapped an arm around her and pulled her tight to his side. Perfectly normal.

11. Chapter 11

Early the next morning, they were off to Paris for the weekend, hopping aboard an hour-long flight across the English Channel. Wanting to drop their bags off before heading to breakfast, they checked into their room in the pretty little boutique hotel Beverly always enjoyed reserving when she'd be in the city. Walking up the two flights of beautifully-tiled stairs to their room, they opened the door and Beverly froze awkwardly. There was only one bed. Beverly had specifically requested a room with two.

Pennywise instantly understood her dilemma. "Do you want me to go back down and see if they have another room available?" he asked gently.

Beverly blinked rapidly, snapped out of it, and turned her head to him. "No, no. It's fine. It's totally fine. It's pretty big. There's plenty of room." she fired off rapidly, clearly flustered.

"Okay..." he drawled, feeling more than a bit nervous about sharing a bed with her. "Breakfast, then?"

The pair set off for a lovely little bistro that the hotel concierge had recommended when Beverly called to book the room. As promised, both the food and the ambiance were exceptional. It would have been quite romantic, Beverly thought to herself, if they had visited for dinner instead of breakfast. It was a good thing they didn't.

In the middle of their meal, Beverly's phone rang. Quickly glancing at the called ID, her eyes widened and she excused herself to take the call outside, with 'Robert Gray' watching curiously from inside.

"Bill!" she said, hoping her voice didn't relay her discomfort. "How are you? It's been a while!"

It was true - they hadn't spoken, at least not on the phone, since Derry, and Beverly was secretly experiencing a good deal of anxiety over his seemingly completely random phone call.

"I'm doing well." Bill replied cheerily. "I'm in Paris on a book tour.

Audra said she remembered hearing that you might have a show here this weekend. Is that true?"

She confirmed Audra's news, watching Pennywise through the window as she spoke.

"So... drinks tonight, then?" Bill asked. "I found this great little wine bar in the Latin Quarter, if that sounds like something that you'd be into."

"Sure, yeah, that sounds great." Beverly answered in a rush. "Does 8:00 work?"

"That's perfect!" Bill confirmed. "I can't wait to catch up with you."

They hung up, with Bill promising to text her the name and address of the bar, and Beverly walked back inside, sitting down without saying a word. Eventually looking back up to Pennywise, she answered his questioning gaze with a sigh and a single word - "Bill."

He felt a strange sense of dread fill his stomach, the likes of which he hadn't felt since over 27 years prior, when he experienced fear for the first time. Noticing his furrowed brows and paling face, Beverly placed a comforting hand on top of his.

"Hey," she began, prompting him to look up from his food to meet her eyes. "Nothing's going to happen. It's fine."

He nodded curtly, and quickly changed the subject, finding random things in his surroundings about which he could ask Beverly questions. For the remainder of the meal, she taught him about things like cultural differences between dining in an American versus French establishment, which eating utensil to use for the various dishes in a multi-course meal, and how to politely get the attention of the waiter when it was time to pay (which, as he learned, was not by yelling "Hey! Come here!")

It was a truly lovely day for February, so they chose to walk the streets of Paris for the remainder of the day, stopping into shops, galleries, and museums whenever the inspiration hit. Walking side-by-side, Beverly found herself overcome by the powerful, incredibly

frustrating urge to hold Pennywise's hand, or snuggle up beside him with his arm wrapped around her shoulders. It was just the ambiance of this romantic city, she assured herself. She was simply lonely, and inspired by all the happy couples that roamed alongside them.

Unfortunately, she was fairly certain he felt the same urges, as he instinctively moved to place his large hand on the small of her back at one point, pulling it away at the last moment and awkwardly bringing it up to his mouth to fake a cough. It was in these kinds of moments, Beverly mused, that he seemed the most human. She felt confident that, after their month was up, he'd integrate into human society just fine, moving on from her to find his own place in the world. The thought brought a painful lump to her throat.

They finished up their day with a casual takeout dinner, which they ate on the hotel bed while Beverly caught up on some work and Pennywise explored the wild, wonderful world of French television. At 7:00, Beverly began to get ready for her outing with Bill, heart pounding and hands shaking as she applied a bit more makeup, changed into a nicer outfit, and refreshed her hairstyle. When she exited the bathroom, the way the clown on the bed smiled at her briefly made her forget all about her nerves... and then quickly made them far worse, the implication of their connection making her dread seeing Bill even more.

As she feared, once she arrived at the little wine bar, Bill instantly wanted to jump right into discussing the events that took place last time they were in Derry. He was positively giddy still, having "killed" the monster that stole his brother away once and for all, and Beverly found herself silently fuming at the way Bill was talking about Pennywise. Though she smiled and nodded along with his insults and excited storytelling, her mind was a constant string of "How dare you?! Don't talk about him like that!"

She was painfully aware of the absurdity of her reaction. Her mind was behaving as though Bill were sitting across from her at this little two-top, fervently insulting her boyfriend. Zoning out while Bill told the story of returning home to Audra, feeling the weight lifted off of him for the first time in his life, Beverly came to the realization that she really *had* been thinking of and treating Pennywise like her boyfriend. And that this *thing* she'd been treating like a romantic

partner was exactly that - a THING.

A thing. Not a person. A thing. A thing that murdered and ate Bill's little brother. A thing that led Stan Uris to take his own life. A thing that murdered Eddie Kaspbrak right in front of her eyes. A thing that terrorized, kidnapped, and tried to kill HER. *What the fuck was she doing?!* Had she really sold her soul and any remaining trace of her morality for the promise of something she clearly didn't even want that badly, since she hadn't yet decided what her payment would be?!

Whether she was a particularly good actress or Bill was just too wrapped up in his own story to pay any mind to the external signs of Beverly's internal breakdown, Bill was still gleeful by the time they finished their drinks. He told her that it was wonderful to see her again. She lied and returned the sentiment. They promised to meet up again soon.

Beverly slowly made her way back to the hotel, a terrible mix of dread, shame, and anger growing in the pit of her stomach. She entered the room wordlessly, heading straight to the bathroom to remove her makeup and change into pajamas. Pennywise stared at the closed bathroom door, hurt by her lack of greeting.

By the time she returned, bare-faced and clad in the same silk pajama set she'd worn their first night together, she still wouldn't look at him or utter a single word. A sinking feeling in his stomach told him that something had happened with Bill tonight.

"Bev?" he asked softly, voice filled with hurt and uncertainty.

She didn't respond. She simply went about her nightly routine as though she were alone in the room. He rose from the bed, walking around the foot to approach her from behind, placing his hands gently on her shoulders. Rapidly spinning around and shaking off the hands, she glared at him and shoved him out of the way, heading to the desk to plug in her phone.

"Bev... please talk to me." he pressed, a hint of panic now evident in his tone. "You can't just ignore me."

Beverly finally snapped. "I don't have to talk to you if I don't want to, Pennywise!" she spat. Her use of his full name for the first time in a week felt like a slap in the face, and he flinched visibly. "That's not the type of relationship we have. I'm your teacher for the next few weeks, not your girlfriend!"

He froze, feeling as though she'd just stabbed a knife through his chest. "I... I didn't say you were..." he said softly, voice cracking from the lump that had made its way into his throat.

Unable to move, he watched her as she crawled into bed and turned off the light, rolling over as close to her edge as possible, curled into a tight ball with her back toward him. When he was finally able to move, he went to the bathroom to brush his teeth and strip down to boxers. Returning and shifting the covers out of the way so that he could lie down on his side of the bed, he mimicked her posture. As close as possible to his edge, he curled up with his back to hers, awkwardly still and not the slightest bit tired.

After ten minutes or so, he felt a hand on his forearm. Her hand. It was tugging on his arm, gently but insistently. He rolled over on his back to look at her. Beverly's back was still facing him, but her arm had been extended behind her in an effort to pull him over. The way her chest rose and fell in shaky motions told him she was crying.

Slowly and cautiously, giving her plenty of time to change her mind, he rolled over onto his side and extended his own arms to wrap around her upper body, pulling her tight up against his chest. He spooned her gently, placing comforting kisses to her cheek and the top of her shoulder. Beverly began to cry harder, and so he held her tighter. Though he wasn't using words, he hoped his feelings were sufficiently communicated.

She shifted in his arms, and he loosened his grip, allowing her to turn around and face him. Bringing his hands up to cup the sides of her face, Pennywise tilted her head up to look at him, needing her to see a visual representation of his acceptance and... something deeper. He wiped her tears away with his thumbs, just as he had done in the bar the first night. They were warm, exactly as they had been back then.

She leaned forward and placed a soft, slow kiss to his lips. After a

moment, she broke away to look at him. His large, dark hands moved to twine in her hair as he stared at her with a wide-eyed, nervous, tender gaze. A gaze of acceptance. A gaze of...

She kissed him again, arching tighter against his bare upper body as her own hands came up to wind into his wild orange hair.

When they eventually broke apart for air, he placed a soft kiss to her forehead, tilting her head back down to snuggle against the smooth, exposed skin of his chest. He stroked her hair gently until she fell asleep, safe and warm.

12. Chapter 12

Beverly awoke first the next morning, thankful that their bodies had drifted back apart in the night. Careful not to wake Pennywise, she removed herself from the bed and softly padded toward the bathroom to shower and prepare herself for the long day. She was painfully aware that her actions last night - and they were *hers* - had further muddied the waters between her and this strange student she'd taken under her wing.

When she was done applying the final touches to her makeup, she exited the bathroom to find him smack-dab in the middle of waking up, sitting up and rubbing his sleepy eyes with his fingertips as he let out a massive, frustratingly adorable yawn. Her heart fluttered at the sight, then promptly sank as a wave of sadness battered her chest.

"Morning," he said, voice raspy from sleep.

"Morning," she replied, not meeting his eyes. He wasn't exactly an expert in human behavior just yet, but he knew a sign when he saw one - she didn't want to talk about last night.

"You heading to work already?" he asked instead.

Beverly nodded, appreciative of the neutral topic of conversation. "There's a lot to do before the show tonight," she explained. "But hey! There's a fancy afterparty tonight. Could be a good opportunity for you. Want to come?"

"Like a date?" he joked, punctuating it with a ridiculously over-the-top wink in an effort to make her understand that it was, in fact, a joke.

"Like a workshop," she said, shooting him a comical glare.

He chuckled a bit at her reaction, and told her he'd be there. "But what about the show?" he asked.

"What about it?"

"Well, I'd like to go to that, too," he said, as if it were the most

obvious thing in the world.

Beverly was dumbfounded. Her face went blank and she opened and closed her mouth a few times before the question on the tip of her tongue finally made its way out, albeit delivered in a harsher tone than she intended - "Why?!"

"Uhh..." Pennywise began, looking suddenly bashful, "Because I like seeing your work?"

Beverly's brows furrowed as she looked him over, trying to gauge the sincerity of his claim. After a moment, she decided that she couldn't imagine another ulterior motive, so she smiled and nodded. Inside, however, she was still absolutely shocked by the fact that Pennywise wanted to come support her. No man she'd ever dated - NOT that they were dating, mind you! - cared about seeing her designs, except for Tom... but that was only because he was making money off of them. Pennywise had no vested interest and no way to benefit from her work, he just... wanted to see it.

"Meet me at the front entrance of the Grand Palais at 5:00 and I'll show you in." she told him, picking up his phone to add the location. "Call me if you get lost."

She handed his phone back to him. Even sitting on the bed, he was so tall that their faces were level, and she contemplated giving him a kiss on the cheek before thinking better of it. Unfortunately, the compromise she came to was to stand on her tip-toes and give him a kiss on the top of the head. *Fuck, that wasn't any better.* Blushing intensely, she ran out the door, waving goodbye to the smirking clown, whose arms were now smugly crossed behind his head as he relaxed against the headboard.

As he wandered aimlessly through the streets of Paris for most of the day, Pennywise felt positively elated. Not only had Beverly kissed him twice last night, but she kissed him again this morning. Granted, it wasn't on the lips, but from what he gathered from people watching, the head was also a very highly-regarded kiss location. This idea was confirmed immediately after it popped into his head, as he spotted a man across the street press a kiss to his girlfriend's temple, causing her face to light up with joy. *Nice.*

Lost in his own thoughts, it was already 4:00 by the time he looked at his phone. He rushed back to the hotel to shower and conjure up a nice tuxedo for the evening. In a last-minute stroke of good judgement, he called the front desk to hail a car for him so that he wouldn't mess up his tuxedo or hairstyle in the process of making it to the show.

At exactly 4:59pm, he rolled up in front of the opulent building. Beverly spotted him immediately, and came rushing out to greet him.

"Fuck... look at you." she said, slowly taking in his look. He fidgeted nervously, thinking he might be dressed inappropriately. Noticing his discomfort, she elaborated. "You look incredible, Penn... I mean, *Robert*."

He wasn't sure whether to be flattered or saddened by her comments. On one hand, he did put a lot of work into looking good for the show. On the other, this obviously wasn't what he looked like most of the time. He typically looked much... weirder. Still, as his mind offered, their most heated moments had all occurred when he was in his clown form. He perked up immediately upon realizing this. Clearly she liked the clown, too.

A piece of paper with the name 'Robert Gray' on it sat taped to the backrest of a chair in the front row. Peeling it off and awkwardly stuffing it in his breast pocket, he took a seat and waited for the show to begin. As soon as Beverly's name was announced, he began beaming with pride. Granted, he didn't know much about fashion, but he liked what he saw and, judging by the audience's reaction, so did everyone else. Beverly... *his* Beverly... had designed these pieces, and everyone loved them. Everyone loved *her* ... *He* loved her.

The show ended with an enormous standing ovation, and Beverly Marsh herself marched onto the stage, giving a little bow and wave. A look to Pennywise made her heart plummet and smile falter. It wasn't disappointment she saw on his face - it was deep, intense adoration and pride. Never in her entire life had someone looked at her that way, and she came to the startling, gut-wrenching realization that he... *IT*... was falling for her. It wasn't just heat between them anymore. It wasn't just a little crush. Shit had gotten serious.

She spun on her heel and quickly scurried backstage again, burying her head in her hands and taking deep, steady breaths.

“You okay, Beverly?” an effeminate voice to her right called out.

“Oh. Uhh. Yeah. Hey Gus.” she stammered, turning around to face her dear friend and publicist, Augustin Dubois, a Paris native whose flamboyant personality belied his tiny build. “Just nerves.”

“Well, everyone loved it, honey!” he cooed. “Let’s get you dressed, get you down the hall, and get a nice big drink in your hand!”

Beverly allowed him to lead her by the arm to her dressing room, where she stripped off her neatly-tailored suit and stepped into a backless gown that flowed across her curves like molten gold.

After tossing on a darker shade of lipstick and touching up her hair, Beverly and Augustin walked down the hall to the afterparty arm-in-arm. “Beverly,” he whispered, as though she was about to become privy to a very juicy secret, “there is the most gorgeous man here tonight. I saw him in the front row. Very tall, very regal. Cheekbones that could cut glass. I hope he’s at the pa--”

He was promptly cut off by that very man swooping in from the side to scoop Beverly into a massive hug.

Augustin’s eyebrows shot up in surprise and amusement. Breaking away from the hug and blushing profusely, Beverly made a shaky, awkward introduction.

“You okay, Bev?” Pennywise asked, dipping his head down to scan her face for signs that she might be feeling sick.

“Yeah, I’m fine.” she promised, looking around the room for the bar. “I could use a drink, though.”

“Say no more.” Pennywise told her, rushing off toward the bar. Watching him walk away, she barely even noticed Augustin staring up at her, grinning the most absurdly cartoonish grin in existence. She visible flinched when she looked to her side and noticed him.

“Beeeverly,” he crooned, “he’s yours?! The guys you date just keep

getting hotter and hotter!”

She was completely unaware that 15 feet away, through the crowd of people, Pennywise could hear every word of their conversation when she mumbled “We’re *definitely* not together.” as though the very idea was distasteful to her.

Augustin quirked a skeptical eyebrow at her. “Cut the shit, Beverly. I can see the chemistry you guys have. If you’re not official yet, you will be soon.”

A large scowl crossed Beverly’s face, an obvious sign that she did not want to continue this conversation. “No. Definitely not. Never.” she told him, hoping he’d back down.

He did not. “Ooh! Why not?” he asked, leaning forward in hopes that Beverly would dish out some top-notch dirt on this gorgeous stranger.

Beverly sighed, looked toward Pennywise to ensure he was still occupied at the bar, and lowered her voice even further - a fruitless endeavor, as he was still able to hear her perfectly well at the new volume. “Suffice it to say, we have a... complicated history. It would never work. Never.”

Augustin actually had the nerve to laugh at that, bringing a glare to Beverly’s pretty features.

“Ms. Marsh,” he began in a mocking tone, “have you seen literally ANY romantic movie ever? All the great love stories start with drama.”

“Not the kind of drama we have, trust me.” she told him in a serious tone, instantly quieting him down. “It’s never going to happen.”

The bartender handed Pennywise two flutes of champagne, which he took with shaky hands and a wan smile. Willing himself to take a deep breath, still his hands, and pretend he hadn’t just heard every word of their conversation, he turned around and began to walk back toward the woman he loved.

“A drink for the lady.” he offered, bowing dramatically and holding the champagne flute out for her. She smiled and thanked him. One

look at his face told her that his own smile was as fake as his handsome disguise.

They powered through the rest of the party, socializing to a degree that would be considered sufficient before they could duck out and return to the hotel. A somber silence occupied the car on the ride back, and neither spoke a word until they crawled into bed on their respective sides.

“I’m setting the alarm for 5:30 so we can pack and make it to the airport on time in the morning.” Beverly said quietly.

Pennywise did not reply.